

Chapter 37

BOYS!— GIRLS !— (BOYS ‘n GIRLS!)



Students of Cathedral School, Sioux City (IA) divided into clusters of boys only and girls only. Inside the school, they are taught in separate classrooms. Seed/Harvest The History of the Diocese of Dubuque, p. 55 1987 Archdiocese of Dubuque Press.

BOYS! The question of teaching them or not plagued Cecilia in 1899 and came back in 1909 to bedevil her again.¹ In 1885, Mother Clarke had requested Rome to “allow BVMs to teach, while the necessity of the times requires it, boys up to 10 years, but no older.”

“Mother Clarke was strongly opposed to our teaching boys over 10,” wrote Cecilia in RE.² In fact, Mary Clarke’s request to Rome explains the division of boys and girls in the Chicago Holy Family parish schools. The Sisters taught boys and girls up to the fourth grade, but only girls from fifth through eighth. This continued at Holy Family until the 1890s, a few years after Mother Clarke’s death, when the Sisters took charge of all the Holy Family schools, including the upper grades of boys.

Cecilia must have concluded with everyone else, that no restrictions remained when the translation and printing of the Rule read, “They are to teach children.” Early in 1909, Msgr. Diomede Falconio, Apostolic Delegate, casually brought up the business of boys. He informed a surprised Mother Cecilia that the Latin Rule read *puellae*, feminine for *children*, restricting BVMs to teaching girls only. They must immediately withdraw from teaching boys and separate all co-educational classes as well. Falconio said this as if it were as easy as changing to a different sweater.

It has to occur to anyone in the 21st century reading about what seems minutia that the Delegate had little else to do but harass the BVMs. Why were they singled out? Was this the beginning of a general audit of American congregations of women? Who was urging Falconio to see about novices and boys, perhaps directing him to BVMs as examples? One suspects that the chaplain, Fr. Arthur Clark, who was present when the Delegate visited Mt. Carmel, knew Mother Cecilia was in Davenport when he ushered Falconio into the parlor and even that he had a hand in it.

Or was Cecilia too memorable in grace and personality for her congregation to escape notice? Were BVMs too famous in Chicago as teachers? Were too many pastors insisting on their teaching older boys? Did Cecilia herself bring up the fatal topic of BOYS, perhaps to rid the congregation of having to teach them in small parish high schools, to shake loose more BVM high school teachers for St. Mary?

No matter who mentioned it, the question of boys had come up. The resulting command from Falconio that the Sisters stop teaching older boys immediately and separate all co-ed classes into only boys and only girls dealt a body blow to priests and bishops wherever the congregation staffed parish schools. If Cecilia had not thought of that ancient remedy of boiling water dropped from monastery walls near unwanted ecclesiastical messengers, many a parish priest and bishop now did—with a variety of other warm welcomes included. Pastoral tempers soared! Irritated men wrote letters to the motherhouse; wrathful men wrote the Delegate in Washington; irascible and/or powerful ones wrote Rome!

This **boy problem** hit the small country school hard. Pastors envisioned their boys headed for the public schools, themselves unable to support two grades where one co-ed grade had sufficed before. Hiring a male teacher for the boys looked financially impossible. Many priests

expressed strong negative opinions about short clergy from Rome knowing nothing about the problems of midwestern parishes or the established practice of co-education in the American church! Falconio had upset the whole U.S. Catholic school system with a single directive.

Most bishops angrily consigned all Italian Delegates to Rome and other suitable hot places, protested loudly, and then settled down (as usual) to wait out the situation—hiring no one and making token gestures toward separate classes. Their sympathy went out to the Sisters caught in the middle—in some schools one Sister must now teach all eight grades of boys or girls where before she could teach four co-ed grades.

Cecilia wrote to a friend in April: “May God take care of us all. We are so anxious about this boy question—as well as other things.” And to another Sister in August: “You will see little of me, but come anyway. Do keep praying for myself and my needs. I don’t much like ‘leaving God for God’—a little of it is all right—but oh! the loss!” Letters of Mother Cecilia Dougherty, BVM Archives, 1909.

Mother Cecilia possessed a girls’ boarding school background. Where her sympathies lay in the matter of boys, she finally said in a letter to Falconio delivered to him by Bishop Garrigan of Sioux City.³ BVM boys’ teachers throughout the country came out strong for their boys, joining the pastors despite the March 27, 1909 letter from the Council stating:

You will read this letter to the Sisters and it will be well to remind all that we willingly conform to any directions received from the Holy See, and that no Sister is at liberty to criticize such directions or to suggest possible improvements.

A March 10, 1910 later entry in RE indicates less than silence. “The restrictions regarding our teaching boys have aroused much disfavor with pastors and even in some Sisters.” This low-key Lambertina comment indicates much dissatisfaction merely because it is made at all. On the other hand, girls’ teachers relished the prospect of teaching only the feminine portion of the human race. To complicate the situation, the bishop of Dubuque, John J. Keane, became too ill with “senile epilepsy,” to intervene.

In March 1909, Bishop Garrigan of Sioux City called on Mother Cecilia. He offered to visit Washington and speak to Falconio on behalf of the congregation if a coadjutor was not appointed for Keane before April. Bishops and pastors now feared a potential ruling from Rome about boys

involving more congregations of Sisters than BVMs. After all, the ruling about the year of novitiate had not stopped with BVMs!

Some priests favored a petition signed by all priests and bishops requesting Rome to change the BVM Rule. To this Cecilia reacted with annoyance, writing Falconio that if the BVM Rule needed changing, the BVMs would do it themselves! That put a damper on most meddling clergy for the time being.

In May (1909) the situation shifted back a bit. Word came that Sisters could teach boys in eighth grade and in commercial if the boys were not over 14 years of age; in high school, not at all. The concession posed its own problem, one overlooked by the compromisers who by this time heartily wished the whole thing would just go away. They had forgotten that some eighth grade boys were slower, had been held back, or reached 15 in mid-year. Since it worked before, pastors tried roaring again!

Parish priests wanted their boys in parish high schools. According to them, the teens were exactly the time when a boy needed help from his religion. When the next part of the May '09 recommendation reached them—to do away with co-education as soon as possible—the bishops gathered forces. RE⁴ carries a summary of Garrigan's letter to Falconio on BOYS:

“ . . . If BVMs refuse boys over 14 years of age, next year we will lose 1330 boys. In 36 of our (Sioux City diocese) schools, we find it impossible to do away with co-ed in the lower grades—don't have teachers and the additional salary is a burden.”

Finally, Falconio, bewildered by the hornet's nest of small-town Iowa pastors and irate Chicago clergy that he had stirred up, shrugged and told each bishop he, the Delegate, could ask Rome for no more *rescripts*. Each diocese must in future handle the problem in its own way—the bishop giving the Sisters permission to teach boys where this was necessary.

RE provides part of the finale to the separation of boys and girls three years later in a May 2, 1912 entry: “Re/co-ed: For those over 12 years, observe the decree, but in exceptional cases if the Bishop insists, an exception may be made. Between 7 and 12, they may continue in the same room in hope of later separation.”

Immediately, bishops kindly supplied permission in response to the congregation's formal request—sometimes without waiting for it. Sisters,

pastors, bishops, and parents settled down once more to business as usual after a hassle lasting the better part of three years. Occasional skirmishes on the subject continued until the 1914 BVM Rule altered the wording to include boys. One concession was not made: no boys were accepted for private music lessons after age 12. It is entirely possible a 1904 music teacher in Waterloo inadvertently caused the whole boy tempest.

RE faithfully followed the problem to its conclusion and locates the initial discussion about a Cardinal Protector as involved in the boys' question. A May 23, 1904 entry states, "We're ready to petition [for a Cardinal Protector] but reconsidered. Re/matter of teaching boys. Angry!"⁴ During the boy controversy, RE identified some of the problem as Bishop John J. Keane's illness—a gradual slip into senility. (Coogan2 333-334 quotes Bishop John Keane's diary on his memory loss, etc.). Two final entries in RE slowly closed the matter:

RE/June 18, 1912—The new archbishop [J.J. Keane] has sent out a circular to his priests stating that the Sisters will teach boys in high school. Mothers Ascension and Cecilia called on him today to secure his authorization for this, in writing as a measure of protection for the Congregation. He promised to send it. This is to have effect only in his diocese. We also spoke of an increase in salary of high school teachers to \$35.00 per teacher per month. He approves.

RE/November 21st repeats the ruling cutting the co-ed knot. "We should teach boys as long as they stay in our schools; and that while we should discourage boys in high school, co-education where we cannot avoid it we must have it." The archbishops, bishops and pastors have had their way, and the Sisters have to make it all work. Cecilia and Ascension insert from Archbishop Keane a small increase in stipend for high school teachers. No Sisters in small high schools have been released, but those in small grade schools can return to a co-ed class with only four grades to teach instead of all eight. The home team won.

In 1911, the congregation finally decided to apply for a Cardinal Protector—a move brought on by Archbishop James J. Keane's attempt to tell the BVMs who should give their retreats. He was disenchanted with the Jesuits and forcefully argued against having them for retreats in his diocese. Keane's interfering with their choice of a retreat master plus the Council's ongoing experience of being tossed around during the BOYS question at the whim of apostolic delegates, bishops, pastors and their own bishop

convinced the Council this time to carry through on the petition for a Cardinal Protector in Rome. They contacted Falconio.

Here Falconio was on home ground. Through his aid and that of the Jesuits, Cardinal Merry del Val, Papal Secretary of State and friend of Falconio, wrote in 1911 that the BVMs were under his care (RE, Nov. 27). The Council sat back with a sigh of relief.

In the meantime, not all of Cecilia's energy had gone into the matter of the full year of novitiate or the problem of boys. She and Antonia Durkin continued to explore ways of educating Sisters beyond high school or Normal school. At last, in 1911, they heard of a Normal Institute to be held in Washington, D.C., under the sponsorship of an old friend, the Rev. Dr. Thomas Shields who had lectured more than once at both The Mount and Mt. Carmel. He headed the education department at Catholic U. Cecilia immediately wrote asking about registration for her Sisters.

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Notes to Chapter 37

1. The Third Plenary Council of Baltimore decreed: “a school be erected at once and perpetually maintained in every parish save where the Bishop of the diocese recognized the impossibility of providing one.” Coogan2 106.

Passage from the Council of Baltimore:

“Parents who neglect to give this necessary Christian training and instruction to their children, or who permit them to go to schools in which the ruin of their souls is inevitable, or finally, who send them to the public schools without sufficient cause and without taking the necessary precautions to render the danger of perversion remote... that such parents, if obstinate, cannot be absolved is evident from the moral teaching of the Church.” Coogan2 455, 456 provides details on the responses of many bishops to the ruling on BVMs teaching boys in high school. Most bishops gave their approval. Falconio carefully advised the congregation to “. . . see that the case of such young men be entrusted to elderly and proved Sisters.”

2. Cecilia quotes the words of Mother Clarke in RE.

3. The 1910 visit of Garrigan to Falconio also carried the thought of Mother Cecilia on the teaching of boys. She wrote giving arguments in favor of BVMs continuing to teach them. For excerpts from Cecilia's letter to Falconio, see Coogan2 329 - 330.

4. RE May 1904

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Appendix to Ch. 37

Letter received from Sister Mary Ambrosina McKinley, BVM, on January 3, 1988

Several points further explained by her from her own memory of what happened in regarding the regulations given about Sisters teaching boys...

I was a sophomore 1911-12 at St. Mary's school in Iowa City when these regulations came out. Rev. A. J. Schulte was our pastor. He is the one who took over the sponsoring of our Rules in Rome when Msgr. Hostlott died. He saw them through to the end.

Because of this I believe he always felt the Sisters owed him the best teachers etc. When this regulation came out he was also one of the pastors who objected.

However, we girls were shunted into a small room cut off from another room. What boys, who did not go to the public school, had the original room. Father hired two young lay women of the parish, college graduates, to teach the boys.

This lasted just one year and in junior year we were back with boys and girls in the same room with Sister Mary Claver McDermott, B.V.M. as our teacher.

As I recall in all my eleven years in St. Mary's school excepting 1911-1912 the boys sat on the teacher's right and the girls on her left. There was that kind of separation.

The two teachers hired by Father to teach the boys were Helen Vogt and Grace Rock. Both became BVMs and both left years later. Grace Rock (S.M. Alphonse) entered a Benedictine order.

Sister Mary Ambrosina McKinley, BVM
January 3, 1988

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